THE SEMINARY DEAD-LINE.

The following extracts from the minutes of the late meeting of the Synod of Georgia at Rome is official, to wit:

"The Synod took up the Report of the Committee on Theological Seminary. The Report was considered *seriatim*. The Report was adopted as a whole, with one vote in the negative."

The following is the action of the Synod touching the retirement of professors and the subject of this vote:

This Committee recommended that, "In answer to overture placed in our hands, to the subject-matter of which the minutes of the Board of Directors call attention, the Synod take the following action:

"*Resolved*, That art. 12, sec. 3, of the Plan of Government, be, and hereby is, rescinded.

[Art. 12, sec. 3, rescinded, is in the following words, viz.:

"Whenever a Professor shall hereafter become seventy years of age, he shall be retired at the close of that scholastic year, *unless* retained in office by an annual election in which he shall receive the votes of a majority of the Board. And when a Professor is thus retired, the Board is authorized to appropriate to him such stipend as it may deem proper."]

"In doing this, the Synod calls attention to the fact that art. 12, sec. 2, of the Plan of Government is a sufficient provision of authority for the Board of Directors in the matter of retiring Professors."

Attention is also called to this rule, which would remain in full force were the objectionable and offending age rule abrogated, to wit:

Art. 12, Sec. 2. "When the further continuance of a Professor in the Seminary shall, in the judgment of two-thirds of all the members of the Board of Directors, be deemed undesirable, the Board shall request him to resign, and if he declines to do so, it shall, by a vote of two-thirds of all the members, without a formal trial, dissolve his relation to the institution; and this action shall be final."

It is difficult, if not impossible, to see, and understand with satisfaction, what occasion or reason there can be for any other or greater power in the Board of Directors, for the absolute and discretionary control of the Faculty, than is here explicitly given. It contemplates each case as standing, as it should, on its merits, without being hampered by any arbitrary disqualification or embarrassment; and it assumes that the Church is entitled to the best service available, whatever the age.

The hitherto recognised eligibility and discretionary element in the seventy years rule has been formally abrogated as incompatible with "the spirit of the Constitution"—*i.e.*, of this seventy years rule—and age, pure and simple, regardless of qualifica-

tions, has been made the ground of action, as is shown in the overture. But what reasonable use can there be for anything more than the rule just cited, and which, as noticed in the action of the Synod of Georgia, would still remain in force?

In the Synod of South Carolina, when the Committee on the Theological Seminary recommended that nothing be done on the subject of the overture, the Rev. James E. Dunlop moved, as a substitute for so much of the report of said Committee as related to the foregoing overture, the following resolution: "*Resolved*, That in considering the overture presented by Dr. Laws, referred to in the report of the Committee on Theological Seminary, that it is the sense of this Synod that the rule referred to be rescinded." *This substitute lacked only three (3) votes of passing*. The vote was 29 to 31. The rescinding item, it is understood, passed the Synod of Georgia unanimously.

It is respectfully submitted to the controlling Synods that the two following reasons, for the active exercise of the power invoked for abolishing this rule, are entitled to the most serious consideration, and justify the action of the Synod of Georgia:

1. The rule complained of inflicts a wrong upon the aged ministry of the Church. However blameless the motive for its enactment, as a matter of fact it invidiously discriminates against them by placing an arbitrary obstacle in the way of their entrance upon, or continuance in, an important field of Church work solely on account of age. Even if continued under the rule, it subjects them to an annual ordeal from which younger men are exempt; it weakens their moral influence in the Faculty, and disconcerts plans of work and usefulness in the interest of the Seminary, by advertising their connection therewith as an unsettled contingency; and by the annual announcements of re-election, public confidence in the permanency of the Faculty is disturbed to such an extent as to be damaging to the institution and its patronage. The rule is a blight on the Seminary. The very Director who originally introduced it is among those who have voted to rescind it, saying that it works differently from what was intended, and that "it has become a running sore."

In a word, *experience* has shown that this rule virtually and in fact taboos men of advanced years, whatever their qualifications, competence, and willingness, and even desirableness, to

serve the Church in this field of labor and usefulness. Whereas, as indicated in the overture, the world's history shows that not infrequently the very best of service in State and Church in literature, science, philosophy, is rendered by septuagenarians and even octogenarians; and especially is it the case that, in teaching ability and efficiency, they are unapproached by younger men. Anyway, the aged are justly entitled to an equal standing on their merits. Worldly wisdom furnishes no analogy in support of this arbitrary rule. The annual re-election of Faculties in State schools affects all alike, and upon their recognized merits, regardless of age; and no such thing is known as hanging portions of these Faculties by their eyelids and at an invidious disadvantage in comparison with their colleagues.

The wrong of this anomalous rule against aged ministers and other Church workers is sufficiently plain. It will be noticed that the only consideration urged on the attention of the Synod of South Carolina by the Committee for denying the prayer of the overture was *self-consistency*. It is consistency with right and truth that is the jewel, and not a virtual claim of infallibility.

2. The second and only other consideration that will be named and urged is this:

The general approval and sanction of this rule, in one of the Seminaries of our Church, gives aid and comfort to the pernicious practice, which is gaining currency in the Presbyterian as well as in other churches, of drawing a so-called dead-line across the pathway of some of the most competent and useful ministers of the Church. Where health and strength of body and mind are continued into advanced life, *our Lord himself has given no authority to any man or body of men to draw the dead-line of his faithful and useful servants anywhere this side of the grave.* As emphasizing this matter, it is believed to be legitimate and proper to mention that on the floor of the South Carolina Synod it was actually and emphatically urged, by the leading member of the Committee that reported against the overture, that the rule in question is a kind and merciful provision, for the reason that, whereas the churches have fixed the dead-line at fifty, the Seminary fixes it at seventy! Certainly this must be set down as a freak on the part of the excellent brother, who, as

leader, undertook by such a questionable argument the defence of this questionable rule. Surely there is no dead-line other than that which God himself draws to be recognized in the Presbyterian Church as a fixture and a standard of comparison. The evil is so flagrant and monstrous in principle that it reminds us of Mark Antony's principle of action, who received Lepidus into association with him as a Triumvir that he might use him for a purpose and then cast him off, even against the remonstrance of his colleague, Octavius. Antony speaks thus in Shakespear:

> "Octavius, I have seen more days than you;
> And though we lay these honors on this man,
> To ease ourselves of divers slanderous loads,
> He shall but bear them as the ass bears gold,
> To groan and sweat under the business,
> Either led or driven, as we point the way;
> And having brought our treasure where we will,
> Then take we down his load, and turn him off,
> Like to the empty ass, to shake his ears,
> And graze in commons."—*Julius Cæsar, Act IV., Scene 1.*

Out of a number of expressions, the following is selected from one of the ablest and most distinguished ministers and professors of the Southern Presbyterian Church, to wit:

"DEAR DR. LAWS: I have read your Overture with interest, as I would anything that came from your head and heart; but, aside from this, with interest, because of what it says and the way it is said.

"It is a strong and striking presentation of an important and timely truth. Surely the Church is running wild on young men. I do not object to the activity of the young people and to the amplest recognition of their services. I regard their work as valuable and indispensable.

"What troubles me, and where I think the great mistake is made, is not the employment of the young, but it is the turning down of the old. I have not known but one case, in the past ten years, of a man fifty years old getting a call to an important church in our Assembly. Young men, some of them direct from the Seminary, unknown, untried, inexperienced, are picked up and installed into the most responsible positions. This seems strange, unaccountably strange.

"Inexcusable as this is in the pastorate, it is more so in the professorate. So long as a man retains his mental vigor, and can actively discharge his duties, he is better fitted each year for the duties of his chair. Turn out a man at twenty-five, if he does not fill the place; keep him until he is one hundred, if he continues to do so until then.

"I am in sympathy with your position."

Moses was kept on duty till one hundred and twenty.

All of which is prayerfully submitted. S. S. LAWS.

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A BIBLE STUDY

OF

THE TWO OBSTACLES

BETWEEN

MAN AND HEAVEN

BY

SAMUEL SPAHR LAWS, D. D., LL. D.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

1903